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SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

United Nations information centres in 1993: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In paragraph 11 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the allocation of resources to the United Nations information centres in 1992, "and would appreciate information on the status of the relevant General Assembly resolutions, as well as a detailed breakdown of resource deployment between centres"; while welcoming the action by some Governments with regard to the financial and material support for United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to study ways and means to rationalize and effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and report thereon to the Committee on Information at its sixteenth substantive session.

2. In paragraph 1 (k) of its resolution 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at all sessions of the Committee on the budget of each of the United Nations information centres, including detailed information on the level of assistance being provided by the host countries.

3. The present report is submitted to the Committee on Information in response to the above-mentioned requests. It includes the Department's comments on:

(a) Ongoing efforts to strengthen the information centres within available resources;

(b) Funding provided to each centre for its local operational expenses, excluding staffing costs, from the regular budget of the United Nations in 1993;

(c) Extent of host Government contributions received for 1993;

(d) Some suggestions on how to effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres.

4. The report highlights, in particular, the cooperation and support needed from every host Government to enable the Secretary-General to "rationalize and effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres" (General Assembly resolution 48/44 B, para. 11).

5. The present report deals exclusively with the 58 United Nations information centres that were operational during 1993. Three other centres were either not operational (Kabul) or not reactivated (Monrovia, San Salvador) as a result of local circumstances. In the case of San Salvador, the information component of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) has been undertaking public information activities on behalf of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat.

6. The report does not deal with the United Nations information services at Geneva and Vienna, which have their own budgets and staffing posts within the resources allocated to the Department. Nor does it deal with the information services of the four regional commissions, which operate within the administrative and budgetary mandates of each commission.

II. FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES

7. In paragraph 7 of its resolution 48/44 B, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information about United Nations activities. The information centres also continue to be one of the most important means for creating greater public understanding of, and support for, the Organization.

8. The activities being undertaken by the United Nations information centres are in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Committee on Information and approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 42/162 A of 8 December 1987. By that resolution, the Assembly recognized "the unique function of the United Nations information centres as one of the most important means of disseminating information about the United Nations among the peoples of the world ... . In this regard, United Nations information centres should continue to assist press and information media in their respective countries in accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly and should intensify direct and systematic communication exchange with local information and educational institutions and non-governmental organizations in a mutually beneficial way. Every effort should be made to establish close coordination with other field offices of the United Nations system, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme, in order to avoid duplication of work. Coordination with other United Nations offices should take into account the functional autonomy of the United Nations information centres. The Department should ensure open and unhindered access by all people to all United Nations information centres and to all materials distributed through the centres".

9. Given their increasing role, United Nations information centres actively mobilize the support of local media, Government agencies, parliamentarians, academic institutions, United Nations associations, non-governmental organizations and other special interest groups in promoting the United Nations and the priority issues before it. Their public information and outreach services are tailored to local target audiences. Newsletters and press releases are prepared, and the publications of the Department of Public Information adapted and published in national languages, as required.

10. An important aspect of the responsibilities of the United Nations information centres is to maintain a continuous dialogue with Headquarters, especially when it becomes necessary to "set the record straight" in response to erroneous media reports and articles, and to take the lead in providing media with accurate information on subjects of interest to them.

11. Additional functions performed by United Nations information centres include an increasing level of involvement in facilitating logistical and providing public information support for the growing peacemaking and peace-keeping activities of the United Nations.

III. STRENGTHENING OF UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRES

12. The Department of Public Information continues to make every effort to strengthen the effectiveness of the information centres within available budgetary resources. Special attention has been paid to a number of areas, including the upgrading of the locally-recruited Information Assistants to the level of National Information Officer; the provision of necessary electronic data transmission and retrieval equipment that would facilitate timely access to information materials prepared by the Department and provided by Headquarters; staff training; and other measures to streamline the work of the centres and enhance their effectiveness.

13. The Department is fully cognizant of the fact that the services of highly qualified and experienced local information specialists would enable the information centres better to meet the increased and new demands placed upon them by the host countries, their media and the public at large, and as a result of the special priorities established by the Secretary-General.

14. A recent positive development in that regard was the recognition by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session that the local-level information-related functions at the United Nations information centres meet the guidelines set by the International Civil Service Commission for the National Professional Officer category. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly approved the upgrading of 40 local-level posts in the United Nations information centres to the National Information Officer category in the course of the biennium 1994-1995.

15. Currently, there are National Information Officers at 21 United Nations information centres. The upgrading and/or appointment of National Information Officers at 19 additional information centres will therefore be undertaken during the biennium 1994-1995 on the basis of the results of the ongoing

classification review exercise at field duty stations carried out by the Office of Human Resources Management, and the priorities established by the Department.

16. The Secretary-General may consider requesting further conversions of local-level posts to the National Information Officer category as appropriate in the context of his programme budget proposals for the biennium 1996-1997 and future biennia.

17. During 1993, all 58 information centres that are at present operational were computerized. Action is being taken to provide additional equipment and software, or to upgrade the existing equipment where necessary, in order to enable the information centres to have ready and timely access to Headquarters electronic transmission and information retrieval systems. Full access, however, is dependent on the availability of local telecommunications services. At present, more than half of the information centres have effective electronic mail connections with Headquarters. Others will be linked as soon as local conditions permit. Efforts continue to enhance the ability of all information centres to respond promptly to the developing situations and to improve their programme delivery.

18. The Department has also arranged to provide local training for the staff of information centres in computer applications such as DOS, WordPerfect, Lotus and dBase.

19. As recommended by the Committee on Information, increasing emphasis is being given to working closely with other organizations of the United Nations system represented in the host country. Besides avoiding duplication of work, such cooperation enables the Organization to present a unified image and to speak with one voice in accordance with the priorities established by the Secretary-General. In addition, the cost-sharing of services among United Nations offices could result in some reduction in expenditure which could allow some redistribution of available resources to other information centres.

IV. DISBURSEMENT OF RESOURCES FROM THE REGULAR BUDGET IN 1993

20. The operational funds which have been made available to the Department of Public Information for disbursement for the United Nations information centres are intended primarily for their maintenance and upkeep, including rental and maintenance of premises, utilities, communications, maintenance of equipment, local transportation, stationery and office supplies, library supplies, office and electronic equipment, freight and handling charges for shipment of equipment and supplies, etc. Some funds are provided for local translations and printing of information materials, and for travel within the area serviced by the information centre. To the maximum extent possible, the allocation of the non-staff operating funds is established on a pragmatic basis, taking into account the requirements of each information centre, the availability of funds and the existing circumstances in each host country. The higher disbursement in United States dollar terms to certain centres, therefore, is primarily attributable to their high-cost locations, especially where the host Government does not provide rent-free office premises. A breakdown of regular budget

resources allocated to individual centres during 1993, excluding staff salaries and costs, is provided in the annex to the present report.

21. Particular attention should be given to the fact that operational funds for every information centre, even those for which host Government financial support is anticipated, have to be provided at the beginning of each year from the Department's regular budget allocation. In due course, some expenditures can be offset, as appropriate, when a host Government's annual contribution is received and credited at United Nations Headquarters. However, it should be noted that there is no fixed schedule for the submission of contributions by host Governments. Furthermore, the level of some host Government contributions fluctuates and cannot be projected or anticipated with accuracy.

22. Limited regular budget resources make it even more important to encourage and promote the active involvement and support of Governments, United Nations associations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and other interest groups. The Department of Public Information has to seek and rely on host Government support to supplement available resources from the regular United Nations budget which are disbursed to all information centres.

V. HOST GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR THE INFORMATION CENTRES

23. During the early years of the Organization, United Nations information centres were financed completely out of the regular budget of the United Nations, supplemented in some cases by voluntary host Government support - either rent-free office premises or some financial support, or both. Information centres were opened on the basis of informal understandings with host Governments and without formal agreements.

24. In its resolution 1405 (XIV) of 1 December 1959, the General Assembly, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to enlist the cooperation of the Member States concerned in providing all possible facilities for the establishment of such new centres and in assisting actively in efforts to promote wider public understanding of the aims and activities of the United Nations. Following the adoption of that resolution, the Department of Public Information began to request Member States that wished to establish United Nations information centres or information components in their countries to indicate the extent of their support in written agreements signed between the United Nations and the host Government concerned.

25. Over the years, the ad hoc support received from host Governments has varied. Many continue to provide invaluable assistance for the information centres in cash or in kind. At the same time, the level of funds provided by some other Governments has either remained the same or even decreased, while a number of others have ceased providing financial support altogether. Many Governments have so far failed to offer any support at all.

26. For 1993, 19 host Governments provided rent-free office premises, 7 provided both rent-free premises and financial support, and 2 provided rent-free premises and the services of local staff at no cost to the United Nations. Ten Governments provided a financial contribution only.

Unfortunately, funds received from some Governments were below the anticipated level or inadequate for the agreed purposes, especially for payment of salaries and related costs of the staff in posts funded from extrabudgetary sources. Twenty Governments did not provide any support. The annex contains the breakdown of host Government support for 1993 for the 58 United Nations information centres that are currently operational.

27. As the Department is being called upon to absorb an increasing amount of extrabudgetary funding, the overall situation needs to be addressed.

VI. REDRESSING DIFFERENCES IN ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

28. As indicated in paragraph 20 above, the Department of Public Information is making every effort to allocate available resources to all information centres on a pragmatic basis and taking into account the existing circumstances in each host country. Understandably, centres in high-cost locations receive higher financial allocations, especially if host Governments do not provide rent-free office premises or financial contributions to offset the costs.

29. In this regard, the Department is vigorously pursuing a number of options to help lower existing expenditures in some high-cost countries. A positive development in this context was the termination of the unfavourable long-term lease agreement for the premises of the United Nations information centre in London. The Department negotiated the surrender of the lease agreement to a third party, which has given the centre until the end of June 1994 to vacate the premises. It is anticipated that more suitable office premises at current open market rates would result in savings of some 50 per cent or more per year over the current expenditure.

30. Experience has shown that when expected financial support from host Governments for local operating costs and extra-budgetary staff costs are either inadequate or not received, the relevant information centres are not able fully to provide the services expected of them. In addition, the work of other centres is adversely affected, as the available funds from the regular budget have to be redeployed to cover the funds that are outstanding.

31. A principal means of redressing differences in the allocation of resources to all United Nations information centres is effective and meaningful support from every host Government on an assured, realistic and continuing basis. First, Governments that have discontinued payments need to resume their obligations. Secondly, Governments that have decreased their level of support should take into account actual requirements. Most certainly, it would be very helpful if Governments that do not provide any support would begin to do so.

32. Equally important, the provision of additional staffing and financial resources by the General Assembly should be a prerequisite for the establishment of new United Nations information centres and information components, as well as for the enhancement of the existing centres.

33. The Department, therefore, invites the attention of the Committee on Information to cases where there is no host Government support or where extrabudgetary commitments are not being met. Clearly, insufficient funds to maintain operations funded from committed extrabudgetary sources have a negative, and sometimes crippling, effect on the operations of other centres. Furthermore, as funds then have to be redirected from other centres to meet the ongoing needs, the network of United Nations information centres as a whole is ultimately affected.

Annex

ALLOCATION OF UNITED NATIONS REGULAR BUDGET FUNDS AND HOST GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

31 December 1993

Centre	Established	United Nations Regular Budget		Host Government Support			
		Posts	Operational funds (excl. staff costs) (US$)	Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary commitments for staff funding (US$)	Cash contribution actually received for 1993 (US$)
Accra	March 58	P4; 5 local staff	24,600		yes		
Algiers	Sept. 63	4 local staff	17,000		yes		
Ankara	March 75	2 local staff	25,400	January 75	no		
Antananarivo	January 63	2 local staff	17,800		no		
Asuncion	October 82	2 local staff	12,400		no		
Athens	April 54	5 local staff	108,400	October 82	no		98,418.97
Beirut	Sept. 82	5 local staff	31,900		no		
Santa Fe de Bogota	May 54	P4; 5 local staff	121,700	1955	no		70,000.00
Brazzaville	June 63	5 local staff	52,100	June 63	yes		
Brussels	January 75	5 local staff	212,700	January 76	no		62,857.14
Bucharest	June 70	1 local staff	10,100	April 70	yes	5 local (42,371.21)	2,480.66
Buenos Aires	Nov. 48	5 local staff	128,200		yes		69,998.99
Bujumbura	June 61	4 local staff	29,100		yes		
Cairo	April 49	5 local staff	71,400		no		238.67
Colombo	August 61	4 local staff	19,200		yes		
Copenhagen	Dec. 46	6 local staff	125,000	January 89	no		41,332.65

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Centre	Established	United Nations Regular Budget		Host Government Support			
		Posts	Operational funds (excl. staff costs) (US$)	Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary commitments for staff funding (US$)	Cash contribution actually received for 1993 (US$)
Dakar	April 64	P5; 4 local staff	60,500		yes		
Dar-es-Salaam	June 61	4 local staff	34,500	1961	yes		
Dhaka	August 81	4 local staff	53,800	August 81	no		2,531.65
Harare	Nov. 1982	5 local staff	14,000		yes		
Islamabad	March 51	P4; 7 local staff	41,500		no		5,752.51
Jakarta	August 85 (re-opened)	P5; 4 local staff	46,700		yes	Services of Watchman	
Kabul a/	October 58	2 local staff	300				
Kathmandu	April 64	3 local staff	16,700		no		
Khartoum	October 63	P4; 4 local staff	48,100	May 63	yes		
Kinshasa	July 64	5 local staff	22,500		no		
Lagos	May 67	P5; 5 local staff	37,200	Nov. 64	yes	2 local (4,749.34)	2,783.73
La Paz	Sept. 63	3 local staff	20,100		no		2,949.00
Lima b/	April 60	6 local staff	51,700		no		
Lisbon	Nov. 77	P4; 3 local staff	75,800	Sept.78	yes	2 local (63,844.26)	95,000.00
Lome	May 62	4 local staff	12,800		yes		
London c/	January 47	D1; 7 local staff	547,700		no		

Centre	Established	United Nations Regular Budget		Host Government Support			
		Posts	Operational funds (excl. staff costs) (US$)	Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary commitments for staff funding (US$)	Cash contribution actually received for 1993 (US$)
Lusaka	October 76	5 local staff	29,800		yes		
Madrid	May 88	P5; 4 local staff	75,200		yes		69,000.00
Managua	July 84		23,400	April 84	yes	3 local (39,337.63)	
Manama	Nov. 77		27,900	Dec.74 & Jan.77	yes	3 local (79,618.90)	33,000 from Bahrain
Manila	August 53	4 local staff	61,800	1977	yes		
Maseru	Feb. 79	3 local staff	7,400		yes		
Mexico City	August 47	8 local staff	173,400		no		
Monrovia a/	October 50		-				
Moscow	April 48	D1; 6 local staff	72,500		no		
Nairobi	August 74	4 local staff	18,800	Nov. 74	no		
New Delhi	January 47	D1; 7 local staff	87,100		no		
Ouagadougou	April 82	5 local staff	61,300	June 82	yes		
Panama City	Sept. 84	2 local staff	45,800	October 82	yes	Services of 3 local	
Paris	March 47	D1, P3; 6 local staff	78,800		no		5,454.54
Port of Spain	January 62	P4; 5 local staff	60,800	1981	no		2,735.32 includes 2,131.44 from Govt. of Barbados

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Centre	Established	United Nations Regular Budget		Host Government Support			
		Posts	Operational funds (excl. staff costs) (US$)	Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary commitments for staff funding (US$)	Cash contribution actually received for 1993 (US$)
Prague	Dec. 47	P4; 4 local staff	31,300		no		
Rabat	Dec. 62	5 local staff	66,000		no		
Rio de Janeiro	March 47	P5; 6 local staff	79,900	1961 & 1963	yes		
Rome	July 58	D1; 5 local staff	87,100		yes		
San Salvador 2/	July 60		2,100				
Sydney	Nov. 48	5 local staff	104,800		no		
Tehran 1/	May 50	2 local staff	30,400		no		
Tokyo 2/	April 58	D1; 7 local staff	453,500		no		
Tripoli	January 60		67,800	May 77	yes	P - 5 (111,814.61) 3 local (128,891.64)	396,663.03
Tunis	May 60	P5; 4 local staff	50,200		yes		
Washington	October 46	D1, P4; 6 local staff	212,000		no		
Windhoek	October 92	P5; 4 local staff	63,000		no		
Yangon	June 59	4 local staff	18,700		no		

Centre	Established	United Nations Regular Budget		Host Government Support			
		Posts	Operational funds (excl. staff costs) (US$)	Signed agreement	Rent-free premises	Extra-budgetary commitments for staff funding (US$)	Cash contribution actually received for 1993 (US$)
Yaounde	October 86	P4; 6 local staff	77,800		yes	2 local (17,808.04)	

a/ Not operational in the country.

b/ The Director of the Regional Disarmament Centre serves as Director of the information centre.

c/ Currently under review.

d/ Not operational.

e/ At the present time, public information activities are undertaken in cooperation with ONUSAL.

f/ Full reactivation with full-time Director and host Government support under discussion.

g/ The Government of Japan provides an annual contribution equivalent to US$ 100,000 for the Trust Fund for Expansion of Public Information Activities in Japan.